

Washington, DC - Rep. Linda Sánchez (D-CA) today delivered the keynote address at the annual Minority Media and Telecommunications Council (MMTC) Policy Conference Breakfast in Washington, D.C.

Rep. Sánchez' speech focused on the importance of minority representation in the media and questioned "how many times a Latina actress on TV is cast as a maid instead of a lawyer, or as a nanny instead of a businesswoman." Sánchez' remarks indicated that policy should "address the persistent, stereotypical portrayal of minorities in the media" and increase ownership by minorities in the media and telecommunications sectors for an equal playing field.

Rep. Sánchez' prepared remarks are as follows:

Good morning. David, thank you for the kind introduction. I am pleased to be here with all of you today.

I'd like to share a quick story with you, about an incident that happened to me about a year and a half ago.

One day in the Capitol while going to vote, I was rushing to catch the elevator, and just as the doors were closing, I threw my arm in to stop it, and jumped in. There were two older, southern men standing inside, and one of them looked down at me and asked, "So, whose office do you work in?"

Dressed professionally and wearing my pin that identified me as a member of Congress, I was dismayed that these two assumed I was someone else's staff. I politely smiled and responded, "Oh, I have my own office in this building." Then the elevator doors opened, and they scurried out.

Because I am young, because I am a woman, and because I am Latina, I know about misconceptions of minorities. And I am working to change them every day.

I raise this issue because minority media is also in a predicament. According to a study by the nonpartisan group Free Press, people of color own just 3% of all local TV stations and 8% of all local radio stations, even though they make up 35% of the U.S. population.

It is not surprising then, that we aren't fairly represented in front of the camera or microphone either.

While we have made great strides in improving the diverse faces and voices in popular media, I remain concerned about persistent stereotypes in the portrayal of minorities in television, film, and other media.

Take the most recent confirmation hearings of Supreme Court nominee Sonia Sotomayor. Love or hate her politics, the last thing you can characterize her as is being unqualified. In fact, if confirmed, she would bring the most judicial experience of any Supreme Court nominee in 100 years.

Yet some members of the Senate have chosen to focus on her ethnicity rather than her experience - even going so far as to “joke” with her that she has “some splainin’ to do!”

Well, they may be surprised to know that not all of us with Hispanic heritage talk like the character Ricky Ricardo from *I Love Lucy*.

The point is this: there is a serious lack of accurate representation of minorities in the media. How many times is a Latina actress on TV cast as a maid instead of a lawyer? A nanny instead of a businesswoman? Given that the Writers Guild of America found that minorities comprise just 10% of television writers, this is no real surprise.

This is why media ownership is so important as well. When minority media ownership begins to catch up to the minority population in the United States, then we stand a better chance of the full breadth of our community being portrayed.

We can do better, and we must do better.

I would like to see a strengthened minority-ownership initiative at the FCC - both in the media and telecommunications sectors. I know that MMTC has been a champion on this throughout its history, and I applaud you for taking on this issue.

As a member of the Ways and Means and the Judiciary Committees, I get to work directly on this issue and many more that have the ability to positively affect minority communities and businesses.

In Congress, I have been working hard to ensure a business friendly and level playing field to encourage minority leadership in media and telecommunications. And I would also like to see a more concerted effort to bring back the minority ownership tax incentives that worked so well in the past.

For two years, I served as Chairwoman of the so-called sleepy Subcommittee on Commercial and Administrative Law - which is funny because in law school, I did the worst in my Administrative Law class! But when I took over this committee, I woke it up and held numerous hearings on the Cell Tax Fairness Act of 2008, The State Video Tax Fairness Act, and the Internet Tax Freedom Act.

Maybe I should try to get my old professor to give me retroactive credit!

I also advocated vigorously for the passage of the Internet Tax Freedom Act Amendments Act. This legislation minimizes the effect on state and local government revenue, treats businesses fairly, and keeps Internet access affordable to consumers.

Ensuring equal employment opportunities, preparing lawyers and law students in communications law, and advocating for greater diversity and minority participation in media and telecommunications are priorities that I share with MMTC.

Today more than ever, the digital divide prevents low-income people from having the same access to internet and broadband service as others - also something that I am watching along with MMTC.

One thing that I am proud of is the much-needed broadband investment in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, especially the 4.7 billion dollars dedicated to Broadband Technology Opportunities Program.

Media consolidation is another issue that faces minority business owners. While we need to turn back the tide of media consolidation, we cannot lose sight of the fact that minority businesses who want to compete in the field of telecommunication services face tremendous barriers to entry.

Congress must look at ways to enhance the ability of small market players and new entrants to compete against the dominant players in the spectrum auction and the FCC should look at other ways to level the playing field for small minority owners.

Reforms we've already made to the Small Business Administration will help advance minority media owners as well as other minority businesses.

Media matters. It shapes opinions. New media matters. It shapes young people's opinions tremendously. That is why I don't just rely on the mainstream media to get my message out there. I have taken it upon myself to use new media outlets to connect with my constituents.

I do public service announcements, frequently update my Facebook page, and post video messages on YouTube so my I don't have to rely solely on the Rupert Murdochs of the world to get my message out there to as many people as possible.

Minority ownership has stagnated and the vast majority of minority-owned stations are AM stations or low-power FM stations. Disproportionately, these stations are licensed to towns some distance from central cities.

The FCC is considering several proposals that would make it easier for outlying stations to relocate closer to their audiences. And I will to continue to work towards rectifying these discrepancies to create a better and more equal playing field for minority media owners.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you, and I look forward to working with MMTC and all of you on these critical issues. Thank you again for inviting me and enjoy your breakfast.